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CHARLES B. WILLIAMS, A. B., M. D.,\* PHILADELPHIA.

"Inveni portum; spes et fortuna valet."

"I have found my Euthanasia, farewell to the battle of life."

Euthanasia means an easy, happy death. The word occurs in Pope's *Dunciad*, and Lord Byron has a poem so entitled. Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, Sir Thomas More and Lord Bacon were all advocates of euthanasia, and have each written more or less upon the subject. Since then writers have at long and irregular intervals taken up the subject of euthanasia, but very little study has been given to it really; it should, therefore, be a sacred duty of every physician to make this subject a part of his studies, and in the words of Lord Bacon, "it should be as much his duty to smooth the bed of death, and render the departure from this life easy and gentle, as it is to cure diseases and restore health." And where there is no hope, after the physician has exhausted all the resources known to science and has found that it is a case not within his power, "to retain the ties of life," then it should be a grateful and sacred duty, nay, it should be the highest triumph of the physician to minister unto the wants of a dying fellow creature by effecting the Euthanasia.

Death is the separation of the spiritual part of man, the soul, from his body. Yet, in reality, we know not what death is, for "we cannot argue from the reason of the thing that death is the destruction of living agents, because we know not at all what death is in itself, but only some of its effects, such as the dissolution of flesh, skin and bones. And these effects do in no wise appear to imply the destruction of a living agent,"† no more, in fact, than the planting of a seed into the earth, for with its apparent dissolution or destruction the plant is born which, in a short space of time, buds and shoots forth its leaves and flowers and becomes a thing of joy to the heart of man.

The same fate awaits all, whether he be emperor or plebian, rich or poor, a prince or a vassal. "When thou takest away

their breath they die, and are turned again to their dust." (Ps. civ. 29.) In the charnel house the skeleton or dust of the king will not be distinguished from that of his subject; and Seneca has truly observed that "in this world, men are born of unequal rank, but after death all will be equal."

When the act of dying has already begun, the following signs, first observed and tabulated by the Father of Medicine, Hippocrates, will be noticed: "The nose becomes sharp and pinched; the eyes are hollow and sunk in their orbits; the ears become pale, cold and shrunk, with their lobes inverted; the face is pallid, livid, or black." These signs conjointly have been termed the *facies Hippocratica*.

Contrary to popular belief, the process of dying, or the act of death itself, is rarely and exceptionally attended with pain or severe bodily suffering. Physicians who have had ample opportunities of observation from their connection with hospitals or in their private practice, clergymen and intelligent nurses will all bear witness to the truth of the statement.

Sir Benjamin Brodie, whose experience in death from surgical disease was vast, states that from his observation, the mere act of dying is seldom, if ever, a very painful process. Anyone who has had practical experience as an hospital interne will have observed that most all severe forms of injury resulting from railroad accidents, crushes, fatal burns, scalds, etc., while the patient may suffer acute pain early, and for a short time after sustaining the injury, yet as death approaches the end is not one of intense suffering but, on the contrary, is calm and peaceful. On the other hand, take some painful affections of the heart. Here, as in surgical cases, the same rule holds good. This may be exemplified by quoting the words of the celebrated English anatomist, Dr. William Hunter. A few moments before his death, turning to his friend, Dr. Combe, he said: "If I had strength enough to hold a pen, I would write how easy and pleasant a thing it is to die."

Persons who have recovered from apparent death by drowning have all, with one

\*Ex-resident physician Pennsylvania Hospital; Dispensary Surgeon Methodist-Episcopal Hospital, Philadelphia.

† Vide Bishop Butler's *Analogy of Religion*, p. 94.



accord, stated that there was an entire absence of pain or suffering of any kind, while throughout the period of consciousness the mind was keenly active—thought succeeding thought with marvellous rapidity, the whole life of the person being reviewed during the short period of suspended animation. The same facts have also been observed by those who have been partially strangled or hanged. Lord Bacon, in his *History of Life and Death*, states: "I remember to have heard of a certain gentleman that would needs make trial, in curiosity, what men did feel that were hanged; so he fastened the cord about his neck, raising himself upon a stool, and then letting himself fall, thinking it should be in his power to recover the stool at his pleasure, which he failed in, but was helped by a friend then present. He was asked afterward what he felt; he said he felt no pain, but first he thought he saw before his eyes a great fire, and burning; then he thought he saw all black, and dark; lastly, it turned to a pale blue, or sea-water green; which color is also often seen by them which fall into swoonings."

*Treatment of those dying:* In many cases the consciousness and intelligence remain unimpaired to the last. It is in such cases that kind words and beneficent acts will go far towards assuring a peaceful end to the patient. "To the dying there is no greater solace and cordial than hope—it is the most soothing and cheering of our feelings, and if, when all hope of life and in the present has fled, the dying man can dwell with hope and confidence upon his future, it will be well for him. The retrospect of a well spent life, "*Memoria bene actæ vitæ, multorumque benefactorum recordatio*," is a cordial of infinitely more efficacy than all the resources of the medical art; but a firm belief in the mercy of God, and in the promises of salvation will do more than anything in aid of an easy, calm and collected death."\*

As long as the dying person is able to swallow, wine, cordials, and food, in such a form as will prove most acceptable to the patient, may be given from time to time. Some may ask: Of what use is it to give nourishment and stimulants to a dying person? The mere fact of showing one's

concern for him about to depart this life, will be more than appreciated by the patient and will effect his euthanasia. Even our Lord did not disdain or refuse a cooling draught when suffering death. For when his expiatory sufferings on the cross were at the point of being finished, He said: "I thirst;" and the exquisite pain, heat and torture doubtless caused his thirst to be intense. Straightway then ran some of the soldiers, and filling a sponge with vinegar (a mixture of vinegar and water was commonly drunk by the Roman soldiers), they offered it to him upon hyssop. St. John (Chap. xix. 30) tells us that our Lord received and tasted the vinegar and immediately gave up the ghost.

The bed-chamber of the dying should be made as light and cheerful as possible, for the question at issue is the passage of a fellow-being into a life, it is to be hoped, that is spiritual and bright. And frequently the patient himself will exclaim: "Mine eyes fail me, my sight grows dim; give me more light." This dying request should be immediately granted, for it will not only lessen the cares and gladden the heart of the departing one, but it will possess an additional interest from the fact that it may be the last favor that we may be permitted to confer upon one who has been dear to us. It should not be forgotten that the sense of hearing in the dying is often very acute, and that it is one of the last of the faculties to be destroyed. Hence all loud conversation should be avoided, lest it interfere with the patient's peace of mind.

When the mouth and tongue are dry and parched, a few drops of iced-water or a small bit of ice will afford great relief to the patient. The drugs that will be of service in effecting the euthanasia are few indeed. They may be counted upon the fingers of one hand. Of these *opium* stands first, and next in order are *cannabis indica*, *cocaine*, *spirits of chloroform*, and *ether*.

Opium should rarely, if ever, be administered to the dying as a hypnotic, on account of the risk of throwing the patient into a sleep from which he may never awaken. The sole object for its administration should be for relief of pain. By the relief of pain, often an apparently refreshing sleep is induced from which the patient awakens more com-

\* Vide *Euthanasia*, by William Munk, M. D. F. S. A. London, 1887.



posed, and he is thus able to depart more easily when his time comes. In cases of phthisis, or where opium is contraindicated, some preparation of cannabis indica may be administered, preferably the fluid extract or the tincture.

Cocaine in small doses may also be used where there is much tendency toward depression of spirits. Or in place of the alkaloid a mixture of the fluid extracts of cannabis indica and coca may be given.

And lastly, where there is great difficulty in breathing, whether from some disturbance of the heart or lungs, or where there is flatulent distension of the stomach or abdomen, a few drops of spirits of chloroform may be given, or of ether, best administered either under the form of Hoffman's anodyne or of "ether punch," the formula for which is the following:

**R**    Aquæ mentæ viridis.....f3 vss.  
       Sacchari.....5ss.  
       Acid. sulphurici diluti.....mxl.  
       Spts. ætheris comp.....f3ij.

Misce et ft. mistura.

Sig.: Pars quarta pro dose.

Many cases will require no medication whatsoever, and in any case, probably, the

less medicine that is administered the better.

S. D. Williams, Jr., in an able article on Euthanasia, published in London, 1872, endeavors to establish the reasonableness of the following proposal: "That in all cases of hopeless and painful illness, it should be the recognized duty of the medical attendant, whenever so desired by the patient, to administer chloroform, or such other anæsthetic as may bye-and-bye supersede chloroform—so as to destroy consciousness at once, and put the sufferer to a quick and painless death; all needful precautions being taken to establish, beyond the possibility of doubt or question, that the remedy was applied at the express wish of the patient."

The above statement would make an excellent text for a long essay or a spirited debate in a medical society. At the time of its publication it created no end of discussion. In answer to it:—"It were better, by far, that chloroform had never been discovered, rather than it should ever be put to so base and awful a use as to wilfully take away the life of a fellow creature in order to effect his Euthanasia.